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ABSTRACT

Child care is an issue of profound significance for children and society, but it is faced with many unresolved difficulties. Children's Action Alliance in Arizona held a series of public forums around the state to give people a wider view of the child care dilemma and to provide a public hearing for those most affected by child care difficulties. The formats ranged from roundtable brainstorming to facilitated public meetings with representative panels. This document offers a synthesis of those events and participants' comments. When the forum discussions were reviewed as a whole, four general themes could be identified that appeared common statewide: (1) parents have trouble finding and paying for safe and nurturing care; (2) child care providers tolerate low wages and lack of benefits or training because costs must be controlled; (3) expanded regulation is being called for to raise care standards, but neither parents nor providers can afford the extra costs that go with it; and (4) these situations are getting worse with time, not better. The report also includes a summary of comments and ideas on participants' vision for child care and the efforts needed to realize this vision. (EV)

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CHILDREN ARE LISTENING...

C[redacted]ns

FOR THEIR FUTURE

PROCEEDINGS OF THE

Statewide Forums on Child Care

PS 029377

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and

Honeywell

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Mayor **George Miller**, City of Tucson
Mayor **Kate Nelson**, City of Chino Valley
Mayor **Skip Rimsza**, City of Phoenix
Mayor **Harvey Skoog**, City of Prescott Valley

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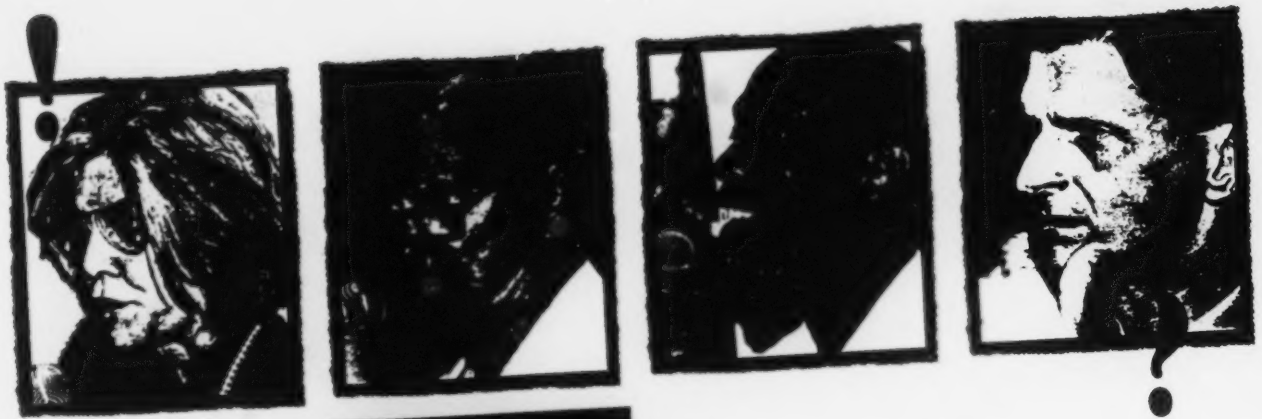
"WE AS PARENTS HAVE TO BE THE ONES . . . WE'VE GOT TO MAKE A STINK! WE CAN'T EXPECT EVERYONE TO DO IT FOR US. Phoenix parent"



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"PARENTS ARE TIRED. WE WORK. WE HAVE SEVERAL CHILDREN TO CARE FOR. WE CAN'T LOBBY THE LEGISLATURE OR DES. WE CAN'T MAKE PHONE CALLS TO POLITICIANS. WE'RE PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE. Tucson parent"

Child Care in Arizona

The notion that families can economically succeed simply by working harder can no longer be supported. As a matter of fact, one-third of families with children who live in poverty have one or more adults who work full-time year-round.[1] Families have become isolated in large part from support mechanisms that were previously available, e.g., intergenerational support from extended families, neighborhood relationships, and religious congregational participation. Economic pressures have forced many women into the workplace. Increasing divorce rates and extramarital births have resulted in the highest number of single-parent families in our nation's history.[2] Prosperity has become exceedingly more difficult for too many families, and it is the children who are denied most by these modern predicaments.

Americans seem to agree that we want families to be strong but the ways to achieve this are the subject of much disagreement. Does strengthening families require money? Governmental reform? Does it require greater social investment by businesses? More assistance from charities? The religious community?

Choosing where to focus creates equal dissonance. Should we aim at helping children directly, or should we aim at shoring up their parents? What is most important to the well-being of a child? Health care? Education? Safety?

Children's Action Alliance (CAA) and thousands of Arizonans who care about children face these questions on a daily basis. If there is anything that child advocates have learned over the past decade, it is that healthy supports for a child produces the greatest benefit proportionate to his or her age. In other words, the sooner things go well for children, the more resilience they develop for coping with possible disadvantages later in their lives.[3]

We consider child care to be an issue of profound significance for our children. Research has confirmed what many have long suspected — that an adverse environment can compromise a young child's brain function and overall development, and in some cases, these effects may be irreversible.[4] The quality of young children's care is strongly suggested to be the primary predictor of how they develop in adolescence and adulthood.

Unfortunately, families in Arizona are faced with a multitude of problems with child care while the providers of child care are themselves struggling. We at Children's Action Alliance reflected deeply on how to help families and caregivers in this state solve their problems so that child care can and will take its rightful place as one of Arizona's chief public and private priorities.

Children's Action Alliance decided to hold a series of public forums, held at strategic locations around the state, in order to give people a wider view of the child care dilemma and to provide a public hearing for

those most affected by child care difficulties. The forums were meant to provide opportunities for parents, providers, and citizens to interact with leaders in business and government and communities about child care. It was our intent to raise the level of civil discourse, provoke participants to seek creative solutions, inspire people to action, and focus attention on Arizona's child care system.

Statewide Child Care Forums

Four forums were held in September and October of 1996 in Scottsdale, Prescott, Phoenix, and Tucson, entitled "Children Are Listening. . . Conversations For Their Future." The formats ranged from roundtable brainstorming to facilitated public meetings with representative panels. American Express and Honeywell, business

SCOTTSDALE

September 18, 1996
Scottsdale City Hall

Host

Mayor Sam Campana

Facilitator

Pat McMahon
KTAR-AM/Phoenix

Panelists

Kevin DeMenna
Robb, DeMenna & Pfister

Jim Evans
Sunrise Preschools

Reverend Jackie Garner
Trinity Church of New Thought

Dr. Paul Koehler
Peoria Unified School District

Bruce Liggett
AZ Dept of Economic Security

Nadine Mathis
Summa Associates

Dana Naimark
Children's Action Alliance

Eileen Ward
Honeywell

PRESCOTT

September 27, 1996
Prescott Valley Community Center

Host

Mayor Paul Daly,
Prescott
Mayor Harvey Skoog,
Prescott Valley
Mayor Kate Nelson,
Chino Valley

Facilitator

Carl E. Brown
President, Prescott Children's Council

Format featured small roundtable discussions with a large group discussion at conclusion

PHOENIX

October 9, 1996
Phoenix City Hall

Host

Mayor Skip Rimsza

Facilitator

Pat McMahon
KTAR-AM/Phoenix

Panelists

Kevin DeMenna
Robb, DeMenna & Pfister

Reverend Jackie Garner
Trinity Church of New Thought

Dr. Paul Koehler
Peoria Unified School District

Bruce Liggett
AZ Dept of Economic Security

Nadine Mathis
Summa Associates

Dana Vila
Sunrise Preschools

Eileen Ward
Honeywell

TUCSON

October 23, 1996
Tucson Public Library

Host

Mayor George Miller

Facilitator

Jan Lesher
President, Lesher Wilson Communications

Panelists

David Bartlett
Arizona Attorney General's Office

Larry Cochran
Arizona Child Care Association

Tina Hermonson
Tucson Electric Power

Mary Belle McCorkle
Tucson Unified School District

Martha Rothman
Tucson Association for Child Care

Dr. Angela Taylor
University of Arizona

leaders with longstanding commitments to child care, funded the events and assisted with the publication of the proceedings. The forums were attended by hundreds of interested citizens who drew a fairly clear picture of the problems and frustrations experienced by people who use, interact with, or are members of the child care community. What follows is an encapsulated synthesis of those events.

When the forum discussions were reviewed as a whole, four general themes could be identified that appeared common statewide: (1) Parents have trouble finding and paying for safe and nurturing care, (2) Child care providers tolerate low wages and lack of benefits or training because costs must be controlled, (3) Expanded regulation is being called for to raise care standards but neither parents nor providers can afford the extra costs that go with it, and (4) These situations are getting worse with time, not better.

THEME ONE: THE FAMILIES' PERSPECTIVE

Over the past two decades, mothers have entered the American workplace in unprecedented numbers. Three out of four women with school-age children and nearly 60% of women with children under six years old are working. According to the 1995 census, some 33 million children have working moms. One-third of those children are under six years old and the rest need some kind of care outside school hours.[5]

Many participants said that the prevailing attitude toward child care is that it is a "family" responsibility. The family is expected to find the appropriate provider, monitor the quality of care, and pay for it. However, at an average $4,600 per child per year, many families are paying nearly a third of their income just to be able to work, and most can't afford not to work.

THEME TWO: THE PROVIDERS' PERSPECTIVE

This financial strain on parents is being felt most keenly by the very businesses that provide child care. Because the market forces restrain them from raising their rates, child care providers and their employees must tolerate distressingly low wages and do without benefits, continuing education, and other opportunities that most businesses use to grow into stability and profitability. Child care providers are the primary subsidizers for parents who simply can't pay more. Worse, the child care industry is restrained from reinvesting in itself to raise the quality of its services.

THEME THREE: THE REGULATORY DEBATE

Child care, on the whole, must meet only minimal standards in Arizona. The state breaks out child care into three general categories: child care centers, group child care homes (those with 5-10 children), and family child care (those who accept less than five children in their home for compensation). Child care centers and group child care homes must meet some standards but family child care homes are completely unregulated (unless they care for publicly-subsidized children). Because family child care is not licensed, it is difficult to know how many providers exist in the state but it has been estimated that at least one quarter of Arizona's children in child care are in this type of setting.

Many forum participants expressed concern about the minimal standards set for child care centers and group child care homes, but they voiced outright surprise

when they discovered that family child care providers are not required to meet any standards.

When the debate about raising standards begins, it is doused almost immediately with the question, "Who will pay for these new requirements?" Parents are at their limit. Providers are barely able to eke out a living now. Businesses are reluctant to get involved with what looks like another employee benefit. Government is redefining its responsibility to social services and wants to do less, not more. Everyone wants standards, but no one wants to pay for them. Meanwhile, children are the ones who suffer in substandard care, and eventually we all pay the price for that neglect.

THEME FOUR: A WORSENING SITUATION

The child care dilemma has been festering for years, primarily because child care has been perceived as an individual responsibility rather than a community responsibility. While child care problems have been largely ignored, the situation has worsened. Out of economic necessity, more mothers have gone to work; because of low wages, more child care professionals have left the field; and government child care subsidies have actually gone down at the same time that there will be an additional 1.7 million women with children on welfare who must go to work. Avoidance doesn't seem to be working.

Child care is floundering with little or weak public policy at the helm. There are more mothers of young children working than ever before. There are more children entering school this fall than at any other time in America's history. Something must be done to energize positive change in this situation for America's children, their parents, and the professional caregivers who are doing everything they can to give our children what they deserve.

Conversations

“ ”

Stating the Problems

There was a surprising level of consensus on the problems, although each community differed in its approach to solutions. Scottsdale heavily favored regulation as a path to higher quality care while Prescott felt that the economic health of the entire community had more impact on child care than anything else. Phoenix was particularly concerned about the plight of underpaid child care professionals while Tucson saw child care as part of a larger dependent care issue.

What's Not Working

The frustration level for parents and providers was high at all locations. The forums themselves were regarded as a ray of hope in what some called "a nearly hopeless situation." The forums often served as a place for these mounting frustrations to be heard and acknowledged yet by the end of each session, participants uniformly found common ground. Although there was some dissent, there appeared to be general agreement on the most outstanding problems.

- The quality of most child care in Arizona is below what it should be.
- Child care, like public education, should be treated as an essential investment in our future.
- Widespread collaboration will be necessary for a successful reform process, and
- There is enough money to solve our child care problems, but not enough political will to do so.

The concerns of each group were far-reaching and diverse but several problems repeatedly came to the fore at each event and represented a shared collection of mutual concerns.

- Child care is too expensive for families.
- There is no standard or process for quality control of child care.
- Wages are too low and turnover too high for child care providers.
- Families and providers are bearing too much while government and business are not investing enough.

Searching for Effective Reform

How to solve our child care problems is where the debate began to polarize. Participants were fully engaged in presenting their views, many in direct opposition. It was exceedingly instructive to see where we must negotiate as a state if we are to craft public policies that will result in all of our children receiving the finest out-of-home child care possible.

There were many suggestions for specific methods of reform and the forums in general were rich with ideas. However, there was great disparity among groups in their fundamental approach to reform, specifically regarding the role of government. They were expressed most often like this:

POINT	COUNTERPOINT
Regulation and licensing are key to protecting children.	Regulation guarantees higher costs,not higher quality.
The government should play a larger regulatory role in child care reform.	Parents should be responsible for quality control, not government.
Child care is a societal responsibility.	Child care is a personal responsibility.

Family Concerns

As might be expected, the concerns of parents were especially impassioned. There were several problems expressed that appeared common to most families, regardless of where they lived and worked.

★ Child care is too expensive

Nearly two-thirds of working mothers in Arizona are single, widowed, divorced, or have husbands who earn less than $15,000 a year.[6] Yet, the annual median cost for full-time child care ranges from $3,700 to $5,550 per child.[7] Frequently, working families name child care as one of their major expenses consuming anywhere from 13% to 30% of their income.[8]

Arizona families are also losing economic ground. Between 1990 and 1994, the number of children living in poverty grew almost twice as fast as the child population.[9] Today, one out of four Arizona children lives in poverty,[10] and one out of five lives in a single-parent family.[11]

Between 1994 and 1996 in Arizona, the annual median cost for full-time care for a child under six increased 16%,[12] while the median wage declined 4%.[13]

Government subsidies are available to low-income families to help pay for child care, but those subsidies only pay a portion of the cost and do not take rising market rates into account. In 1990, state subsidies covered 80% of a families' child care cost. By 1994, they only covered 66%.[14]

> "PARENTS ARE TIRED. WE WORK. WE HAVE SEVERAL CHILDREN TO CARE FOR. WE CAN'T LOBBY THE LEGISLATURE OR DES. WE CAN'T MAKE PHONE CALLS TO POLITICIANS. WE'RE PUTTING FOOD ON THE TABLE. Tucson parent"

★ Finding child care is extremely difficult

Finding child care that meets families' criteria for cost, quality, and convenience is, in one parent's words, "a hit or miss proposition." Child care operates on very slim profit margins and because of that is often a labor of love rather than a serious business enterprise. In order to keep costs within the reach of parents, wages must remain oppressively low, and advertising is rare. As a result, reliable consumer information is scarce.

Resource and referral services have been developed to help parents but they are limited in their scope. Because small home family child care is not licensed in Arizona, there is no database from which to publish a comprehensive list. This type of child care is often found through word of mouth. Parents also have no way of comparing the educational and training credentials of caregivers, their track records in business, or their experience — short of interviewing each prospect in depth and requiring some sort of proof from caregivers.

"WE'RE IN A GREAT QUANTITY CRISIS. FOR EVERY FOUR-YEAR-OLD CHILD WE SERVE, THERE ARE FIVE MORE WAITING. I'M NOT EVEN TALKING ABOUT INFANTS, ONE YEAR OLDS, TWO YEAR OLDS, OR THREE YEAR OLDS. THINK OF THE NUMBERS OF KIDS WHO NEED CHILD CARE THAT'S SIMPLY NOT AVAILABLE. IT'S CRITICAL. IT'S SCARY. Tucson School District Board member

WE AS PARENTS HAVE TO BE THE ONES . . . WE'VE GOT TO MAKE A STINK! WE CAN'T EXPECT EVERYONE TO DO IT FOR US. Phoenix parent"

★ Quality of care is unreliable and often compromised

When surveyed, parents complain loudly about the lack of continuity in their child's care. Due to high staff turnover, children can be subjected to a variety of caregivers, often within a single year. Bonding and trust, essential to a child's early development, can scarcely be established when more than one out of four caregivers leave within a years' time.[15]

Many parents also do not realize that small home family child care is unregulated in Arizona. Unless the caregiver is participating in some sort of state-subsidized program, they are not required to meet any standards at all. Some parents in attendance at the child care forums were openly shocked when they discovered that this group of child care providers in Arizona is not required to meet even minimum standards of health and safety.

"I FIND IT APPALLING THAT WE LICENSE EVERYTHING FROM BARBERS TO HOME BUILDERS. YET WE DON'T LICENSE THE VERY PEOPLE WHO CARE FOR OUR CHILDREN 8-10 HOURS A DAY." Scottsdale mother

IT'S THE PARENT'S JOB TO DEMAND QUALITY, NOT REGULATORS. THE FRONT LINE ON QUALITY IS THE PARENT. Forum panelist"

★ There is not enough specialized care

Parents and child care professionals have long known that there are severe shortages in certain kinds of care. While total child care spaces have increased over the past decade, spaces for infants and toddlers have actually decreased, meeting less than what is estimated to be half the need.[16]

Other availability problems include after-school care and care for parents who work irregular hours such as very early mornings, nights, and weekends. These shortages are expected to worsen with the advent of welfare reform, since low-paying jobs with irregular hours are the kinds of jobs that welfare recipients are most likely to land.[17]

Forum participants were especially vocal about the lack of care for children with disabilities. They described how many families become "hostage" to their homes due to the child's disability, yet there are virtually no services within the child care community that offer reliable relief to these families.

★ Many employers consider employees who are parents to be problematic

With more women in the workforce, the problems associated with dependent care (traditionally the domain of the family female) have become the problems of business by default. According to a national child care advocacy group, U.S. businesses lose $3 billion a year because of child-care-related absences.[18] Several studies have confirmed that employees who have access to reliable child care are more productive.

Many forum participants complained that employers treat employees with children differently. They are "put off" by requests to handle family conflicts. The inherent message is "that's your problem and it better not interfere with your job, which should come first."

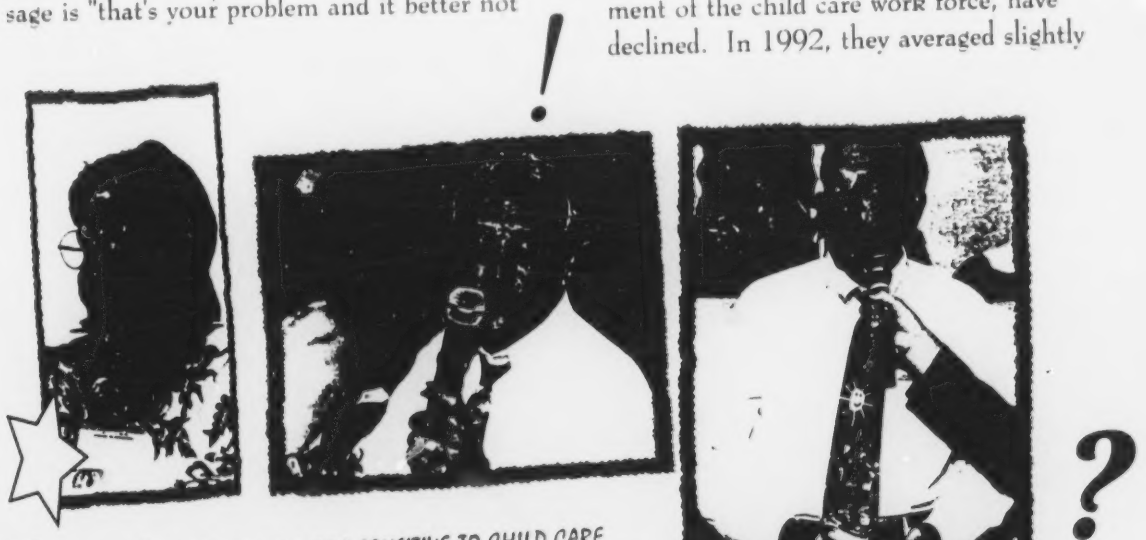
"BUSINESSES HERE VIEW EMPLOYEES WITH KIDS AS A PROBLEM. Prescott working mother"

Caregiver Concerns

Child care providers face a set of problems all their own. They seem to be quite attuned to families' problems, but their most pressing concerns are with the evolution of the profession itself within Arizona. Without policies that encourage and reward professional practices, they feel their profession will never achieve the respect, acknowledgement, or financial value that it deserves.

★ Child care providers can't make a decent living

In 1992, real wages for lead child care providers were just under $9 per hour, or about $15,500 per year. Real wages for child care assistants, the fastest growing segment of the child care work force, have declined. In 1992, they averaged slightly



"BUSINESSES NEED TO BE MORE SENSITIVE TO CHILD CARE PROBLEMS ... AND QUIT STALLING. IT'S TIME THEY GOT INTO THE SUBSIDY BUSINESS. Tucson participant"

above $5 per hour, translating to an annual salary of under $9,000 per year, despite the fact that nearly three-quarters of child care workers have some college background.[19] A survey in 1988 showed that half the child care workers in Phoenix worked a second job to supplement their income.[20]

They do without benefits as well. In 1993, little more than one-quarter of child care centers provided paid health insurance. It is not surprising then that turnover for child care employees, in 1992, was 26% — some 16% higher than the turnover rate for all U.S. companies.[21]

During the forums, several child care providers described what it was like trying to support themselves and their own children on such meager income. One participant with a college degree in child development disclosed that she was offered a position as an assistant director of a private child care center for $6.00 an hour!

An executive of a private chain of child care centers declared staff turnover to be their most serious problem. Because they cannot raise salaries without raising rates to parents, they have attempted to alleviate the problem by offering training and benefits. This helped retention somewhat but, according to this executive, did not solve the problem.

Because child care costs are already too high for most parents, it is simply not possible for center owners or independent family child care providers to raise their rates. That means that the current depressed wages and benefits are frozen until our entire system of child care faces some sort of reform.

★ Lack of regulation permits substandard care to flourish

Small home family child care, in Arizona, is unregulated. This type of child care, where caregivers can accept up to four children into their own homes for compensation, is unmonitored for even the most fundamental safety standards. If caregivers participate in a government-subsidized program, they are subject to some minimum standards, but no one really knows how pervasive non-subsidized "underground" family child care enterprises are. It is estimated that one-quarter of Arizona's children are in this type of care.[22]

At every forum location without exception, family child care providers raised the issue of regulation. Many of them complained that, because there are no system-

wide standards to meet, there are many caregivers who do things that give family child care a bad name.

> "I WORK VERY, VERY HARD TO BE THE BEST I CAN BE. I CARE SO DEEPLY ABOUT THE CHILDREN I CARE FOR. BUT WITHOUT ANY REGULATION IN ARIZONA, THE BAD CAREGIVERS GET AWAY WITH ANYTHING THEY WANT AND RUIN IT FOR THE REST OF US. Scottsdale family child care provider"

★ Lack of training incentives

Unlike public and private education, there is no mandatory training or certification process for people who care for children. Although we would never consider allowing someone to teach our children in school who was not certified, we permit turning our youngest children over to any who declare themselves to be in the child care business. Some child care professionals with degrees resent this inequity but, given the problems with child care supply, that is not likely to change any time soon.

There is a vocal debate about whether training should be mandatory. Many providers think that training should be required because of the vast benefits that accrue to the children and their families. Training also becomes a tangible way for parents to discriminate when they are shopping for the most highly trained provider.

Other providers, however, say they are working very long hours for low wages and don't know how they could fit mandatory unpaid training into their schedule without undue hardship. They believe deeply in continuing education but think it is best left at the voluntary level.

The truth is that independent child care providers must now spend their own resources for training and upgrading their services, yet they cannot raise their rates in accordance with their improved service. They complain that, with no incentives, ambitious hard-working providers are unacknowledged and unrewarded, while less conscientious caregivers often deliver substandard care without consequence.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children has recognized the need for some sort of uniform credentialing process and developed a rigorous accreditation program for child care providers. Although it is strictly voluntary, it does provide a way for providers to set themselves above the rest professionally, but it takes a long-term commitment without financial reward.

There isn't much legislative support for required child care training or accreditation in Arizona. A panelist who works for the state readily admitted that his department is understaffed and underfunded, making it difficult to meet even current licensing requirements, much less enhanced standards.

> "WE WOULD LOVE TO DEVELOP AN ACCREDITATION PROGRAM FOR THE STATE BUT THAT TAKES MONEY AND KNOWLEDGEABLE STAFF AND WE HAVE TO LOOK TO THE LEGISLATURE FOR THE AUTHORITY AND FUNDS TO DO THAT. State administrator for child care"

> "TRAINING MUST BE MANDATED. LIKE ANY OTHER PROFESSION, IT TAKES A MANDATORY CERTIFICATION PROCESS TO MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO GET THEMSELVES TRAINED. Former child care provider and panelist"

★ Child care providers are not considered professionals

Although the educational curriculum for those seeking a career in child care has reached a substantially higher level of sophistication over the past three decades, the child care industry itself is unable to sufficiently reward or retain those who pursue a career path with appropriate wages or a promising future. Providers complain that until steps are taken to separate "the wheat from the chaff" through an accrediting process, that will never change. Even then, they assert, they will still have to deal with the attitudes of people who think caring for children is not worthy of pay equal to other professions.

"IT'S TIME TO LEGITIMIZE CHILD CARE AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT BUSINESSES IN OUR COMMUNITY. Prescott participant

THE BUSINESSMEN IN THIS TOWN THINK CHILD CARE PROVIDERS ARE NOTHING MORE THAN A GROUP OF BABYSITTERS. Prescott child care provider"

THE CHILD CARE VISION

- ★ Children would receive experiences and care that assure healthy, stable development.
- ★ Parents could afford it.
- ★ The child care supply would meet the demand, with children's special needs considered.
- ★ Caregivers would meet established standards for health, safety, and sound child development practices.
- ★ Providers would be afforded opportunities to thrive, prosper, and grow within their profession.

INGREDIENTS OF SUCCESSFUL CHILD CARE REFORM

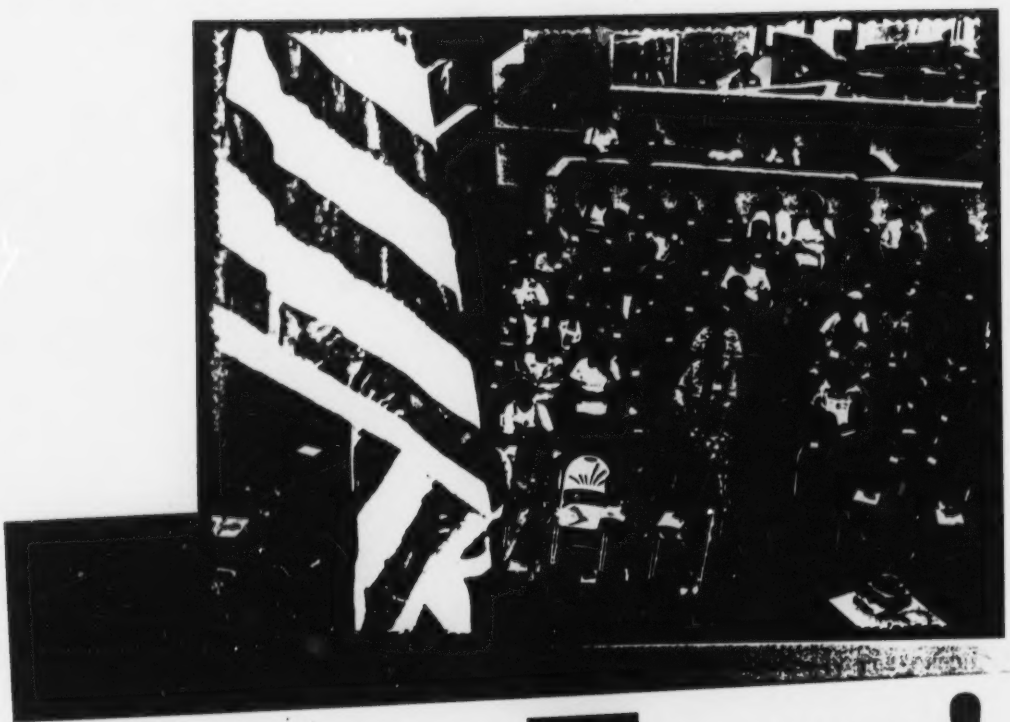
- ★ Leadership
- ★ Evenly distributed costs
- ★ Permanent partnerships
- ★ Commitment to quality

CONCERNS MOST OFTEN EXPRESSED BY FAMILIES

- ★ Child care is too expensive.
- ★ Finding child care is extremely difficult.
- ★ The quality of care is unreliable and often compromised.
- ★ There is not enough specialized care.
- ★ Many employers consider employees who are parents to be problematic.

CONCERNS MOST OFTEN EXPRESSED BY CHILD CARE PROVIDERS

- ★ Providers can't make a decent living.
- ★ Lack of regulation permits substandard care to flourish.
- ★ There is a lack of training incentives.
- ★ Child care providers are not considered professionals.



"CHILDREN ARE LISTENING" !

"Is it possible to provide child care for profit?" Tucson participant

Defining the Vision

The vision for child care in Arizona took on unmistakable clarity as the forums progressed.

The Child Care Vision

The ideal was expressed over and over by parents, providers, businesspeople, representatives of both state and local government, and citizens. If we were to create an ideal child care system in Arizona, it would produce the following outcomes:

- Children would receive experiences and care that ensure healthy, stable development.
- Parents could afford it.
- The child care supply would meet the demand, with children's special needs considered.
- Caregivers would meet established standards for health, safety, and sound child development practices.
- Providers would be afforded opportunities to thrive, prosper, and grow within their profession.

Familiar Solutions

There were strong opinions and many ideas about how best to achieve the vision. Many believed it was a matter of money. They spoke strongly for increased government subsidies and more supports for family child care providers.

> "I RUN THE CHILD CARE SERVICES FOR ONE OF THE LOCAL INDIAN TRIBES AND OUR PROGRAM IS GREAT. IT'S ALL ABOUT MONEY. THE TRIBE PROVIDES US WITH EVERYTHING WE NEED TO DO OUR JOBS WELL AND THAT MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE. *Local child care center director*"

Others felt that mandatory certification and greater regulatory control were the keys to reforming the system.

> "IT'S THE LOW INCOME PARENT THAT GETS POOR QUALITY. WE NEED TO FORCE THE STATE OF ARIZONA TO REALIZE THAT OUR CHILDREN ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THE PRISON SYSTEM. *Tucson child care provider of 28 years*"

New Solutions

Both families and providers complained of isolation and a general sense of powerlessness to correct the child care situation on their own. There were consistent references to the need for greater collaboration, a need that includes both the public and private domains. People want government and business to involve themselves more in helping to find and deliver solutions.

Government has a clear role in establishing standards of health and safety and holding providers to them. It is seen by families as irresponsible and unresponsive to the citizenry to do less. But demanding

quality assurance means that providers must make more investment in their service, something they say they cannot afford to do without passing the costs onto parents. Everyone agrees that parents are already at or beyond their ability to pay. That means that providers need to find new ways of improving their service that can both contain costs for families while preserving, hopefully improving, their own profitability.

It was generally agreed that child care providers need partners — partners with resources who realize that they have something to gain from a healthier child care system. The obvious partners emerged as government and business. But current history has proven them to be reluctant partners. The less obvious, but most intriguing new partner, was schools.

The point was made several times that schools are a "natural" environment for child care since they must already meet health and safety standards as public facilities. They are also neighborhood-based, solving many transportation problems for both children and parents. If agreements could be crafted between school administrators and child care providers that would make such facilities available at a low shared cost, particularly during non-school hours, the benefits would be plentiful:

- Lower overhead costs mean lower costs of care to parents.
- Having child care available in schools means it is easy for parents to find.
- Schools are close to home, therefore convenient for working parents to pick up and drop off their children.
- After-school child care programs are a natural fit since children would have a place to go between school hours and when their parents get off work.
- Mingling school educators and child care providers offers greater opportunities for training and mutual support.
- Many private child care providers are already knowledgeable in early childhood education, thereby alleviating the schools' need to build and maintain a new personnel pool.
- It is easier for communities to combine local social programs for children with special needs with child care programs
- It is easier to access volunteers, especially the elderly.

"SCHOOLS AND CHILD CARE HAS TO COME. SCHOOL BOARDS, SUPERINTENDENTS, AND COMMUNITIES NEED TO START LOOKING AT THEIR PUBLIC SCHOOLS AS A RESOURCE TO BEGIN PARTNERING IN CHILD CARE. THERE ARE SOMETHING LIKE 1100 SCHOOL BUILDINGS AROUND THE STATE THAT ARE STRATEGICALLY PLACED WHERE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES LIVE. THOSE BUILDINGS HAVE ALREADY BEEN BUILT — BUILT WITH TAX DOLLARS. THEY ARE DEEMED SAFE FOR OCCUPANCY BY CHILDREN DURING NORMAL SCHOOL HOURS — SO THEY OUGHT TO BE SAFE FOR OTHER CHILDREN AT OTHER TIMES. THOSE BUILDINGS LIE VACANT IN MOST CASES FROM 3:30 OR 4:00 P.M. MOST ARE NOT OCCUPIED UNTIL 8 O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING AND THEY'RE EMPTY ALL SUMMER. WE NEED TO THINK MORE CREATIVELY ABOUT BRINGING THE CHILD CARE INDUSTRY INTO THOSE BUILDINGS AND PROVIDING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARENTS WHO WILL SOON BE CONSUMERS OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO ACCESS CHILD CARE IN THOSE SCHOOLS BEFORE THE AGE PUBLIC EDUCATION BEGINS. School district superintendent and panelist"

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Is it possible to provide care for profit? Tucson participant ?

Is Child Care a Business or a Social Responsibility?

The debate about how to best reform the child care system was often heated. Many worthy ideas were presented but the discussion kept returning to "what is cause and what is effect?" No one knew for sure. It became necessary to back up and view the process from a wider perspective.

Good public policy is always based upon a commonly accepted principle. Perhaps the reason child care policy is so weak is because the principle upon which it must be based has not been clarified or agreed upon. This prompted a panelist to ask "Is child care a business or a social responsibility?

If we view child care as a social responsibility, it closely resembles our view of public education. Our nation's founders stated in principle that the power of education for young people is directly proportional to the power of our country as a global force. It was from that principle that the decision was made to offer education to all children for twelve years and in theory, distribute its cost evenly through taxes. Although we debate about the quality of public education, we rarely question the principle upon which it is based.

The same issues that distinguish the child care debate dominate decisionmaking in education — affordability, accessibility, availability, and quality. Education has expanded over the years to include both public and private choices. We have watched as certification processes have been developed and teachers' wages have improved in an attempt to attract and retain the best for our children. Some maintain that the only difference between child care and school is the age at which it begins.

If we view child care as a business however, the questions become very different. The answers are motivated by profit. Many businesses have shown that profit and social responsibility are compatible but only when financial reward is based on incentives that promote the desired social outcomes. That is where public/private partnerships can be most effective. If government and/or business have a role in providing financial subsidies to child care providers, they are in the position to dictate the outcomes they are willing to pay for. In other words, they aren't just paying for service, but paying for measurable results that strengthen children and families. Providers who produce the desired results watch profits

"DO WE AS AMERICANS HAVE THE RIGHT TO AFFORDABLE DEPENDENT CARE? Tucson participant"

grow. Those who do not produce the desired results suffer financially.

If government and business can partner successfully on strong policy directives and financial subsidies, and schools and child care providers can partner on highest and best use of resources, it might be possible to forge a new path toward profitable, high quality child care.

Vital Ingredients of Reform

Regardless of whether child care is viewed as a consumer service, a social responsibility, or some combination of both, there were four components which emerged during the forums that provided a greater context for understanding what is necessary to move child care from its stagnant position into its vision. If we are to break through the present barriers, it is likely that these components will be fundamental to success:

★ Leadership is essential

There is a leadership vacuum in Arizona regarding child care. Parents don't know who to turn to. Provider frustration is at an all-time high. Some businesses are actually recruiting and training providers to help solve their employees child care needs but they are the exception, not the rule.

Public leaders must emerge to champion the child care reform process. Whether these leaders are individuals, organizations, or preferably a nonpartisan community/business/government collaboration, leadership is essential. Without it, we will continue to approach our problems in a fragmented way that requires tremendous energy with little or no systemic change as a result.

> "I RECENTLY MOVED HERE FROM NEW YORK AND CANNOT BELIEVE THE LEADERSHIP VACUUM THAT EXISTS IN THIS STATE WHEN IT COMES TO CHILD CARE. Tucson participant"

★ Child care costs must be fairly redistributed

It is clear that no one or two groups can bear the cost of child care. Not parents. Not providers. Not government. Not business. The costs must be redistributed fairly across all the groups who have a stake in strengthening working families and their children. That includes parents and families, large and small business, state and local government, public and private providers, child care centers and family child care providers,

religious institutions, and nonprofit community agencies. Taken to its maximum interpretation, every citizen (even those without children under 16 now) has a responsibility to see that all our children grow up strong and healthy.

"WE COULD LEARN A LOT FROM JERRY COLANGELO. WHEN HE WANTS A SPORTS FRANCHISE, HE SEEKS OUT A GROUP OF LONG-TERM INVESTORS — WHY CAN'T WE DO THE SAME THING FOR CHILD CARE?" Child care provider and panelist

WE HAVE TO ENGAGE PEOPLE WITHOUT KIDS TO FEEL RESPONSIBLE FOR CHILDREN. Tucson participant"

★ Partnerships must be permanent

The partnerships that must be formed to move us to a higher level regarding how we care for our young children must become permanent partnerships if the changes are to prevail. Dramatically increased attention by business, educators, and government leaders will be essential to change but will be just as essential to long-term reform.

★ Quality of care cannot be sacrificed to expediency

Research has shown repeatedly that children's experiences in their first years have a life-long impact on their ability to reach their full potential. Their brains, in these first few years, actually form permanent pathways for how they will respond and adapt to life's circumstances for the rest of their lives. This tells us that the quality of child care is far more important than we are publicly acknowledging. Data show that most children's early years in child care are not adequate. We must somehow find a way in the reform process to first protect a child's right to healthy development, and then go on to tackle other issues such as availability, affordability, and who is ultimately responsible for seeing that these needs are met.

Most forum attendees who responded to our request for written feedback stated that their view of child care was broadened as a result of their participation. They learned many new things and thought that they understood other perspectives more clearly.

It was often concluded that we need to put much greater pressure on our leaders to take up this issue but parents and providers both complained that they can't be caregivers and workers and lobbyists as well. They were deeply grateful that their concerns had earned a public forum but were uncertain about what long-range impact it would actually have on their day-to-day reality.

FORUM PARTICIPANTS GENERALLY AGREED THAT

- ★ The quality of most Arizona child care is inadequate.
- ★ Child care is an investment in our common future.
- ★ Widespread collaboration will be necessary for a successful reform process, and
- ★ There is enough money to solve our child care problems, but not enough political will to do so.

THE CHILD CARE PROBLEMS MOST OFTEN EXPRESSED WERE

- ★ Child care is too expensive for families.
- ★ There is no standard or process for quality control of child care.
- ★ Wages are too low and turnover too high for child care providers.
- ★ Families and providers are bearing too much of the financial burden.

"It Can Be Done!"

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Seizing the Day

In this age of fierce competition for public officials' attention, influence, and resources, child care has not fared well enough. Children's issues are typically vulnerable in the political process simply because parents are busy working and raising children, with precious little time or energy to devote to influencing the public policy process. Families with children number in the millions and are so diverse that they rarely generate the solidarity needed to be an effective movement, leaving issues related to children and their families without strong political champions. Such issues, consequently, escape adequate public debate and the attention that they deserve. Welfare reform, however, may change that.

As state legislators grapple with the tough choices about how to craft Arizona's version of public assistance and have to enact policies that help move people from welfare to work, many of them discover that families with children who can't find or afford child care quite simply can't work. Since the current mood of the nation is to put every able-bodied American to work, child care has been catapulted, by default, into the nation's public conversation.

Factoring In Quality Care

While lawmakers are intently focused on how to pay for child care for low-income working families, very few have seriously considered the "quality" of that care. Yet, two of the nation's most widely circulated newsmagazines have devoted entire issues to the latest research that proves beyond a doubt that a child's early learning experiences are directly related to his or her brain development. Most astonishing is the discovery that the neuron pathways developed in the first few years mark a person's learning capacity for life. The effect of poor quality child care has taken on a new social urgency.

If emerging policy choices are based on funding criteria alone, without provision for "quality care standards," the outcome could result in little more than babysitting corrals. Now that we are beginning to comprehend fully what poor quality child care costs us as a state and a nation, we would be wise to act in our own best interests to avoid the waste of human potential that goes hand in hand with poor quality care.

The time is ripe to act for child care. As the ink on this page dries, legislation is being written and introduced to lay the foundation for child care policies of the near and far future. As the forums demonstrated, there is disagreement in the public debate about how simultaneously to make child

care affordable for parents, profitable for providers, and of optimum quality for children. There is, however, enough agreement that we can make a powerful statement to Arizona policymakers: All public child care policies must

• ensure that children enter school ready to succeed,
•ensure that parents can find and retain jobs.

It is essential that we escalate our efforts to help working families and those preparing to work. It is the stability of the family infrastructure itself that promises the greatest benefit to our children. We should never lose sight of that.

It Can Be Done

Because quality child care is a national issue, there are several inventive programs and policies currently being piloted in various communities throughout the nation, including Arizona. We have included a few examples here to give you a flavor of the exciting things that can happen when governments, businesses, parents, and community members collaborate. They had the courage to say "it can be done" and then acted on their best ideas.

The Arizona Self Study Project (ASSP) is a public/private collaboration designed to enhance the quality of child care centers. Sponsored by three state agencies, several nonprofit organizations, and Honeywell, ASSP has assisted several child care centers through a "hands on" self study process leading toward accreditation. ASSP provides training, technical assistance, and scholarships. ASSP was begun in 1987 at approximately the same time as the Success By 6 Child Care Improvement Project. When it became evident that the two collaborations had similar objectives, they were merged. ASSP is managed by the Arizona Association for Supportive Child Care.

The San Marcos Family Resource & Wellness Center in Chandler is a remarkable example of what can happen when the entire community rallies to help its vulnerable children and families. The Center offers Sunset Preschool from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m., a Youth Recreation Program from 4:00 to 7:00 p.m., a Computer Camp three hours per week, Family Library Night once a week, a science club with volunteer tutoring by Motorola engineers, and two sports camps. They view child care as a quality educational experience and only part of the formula for healthy and strong families. The Center also provides a physician-staffed clinic that provides medical and dental services and prescriptions at no charge; counseling services and parenting classes; an emergency food and clothing bank; and several GED and ESL classes. All programs at the Center are bilingual and free to Chandler residents

The Beatitudes Age Link Intergenerational Child Development Center, due to open during the Spring of 1997 in Phoenix, is a heartwarming success story already. The child care center designed for up to 165 children aged 6 months to 6 years, is being built next door to the Beatitudes Campus of Care, a retirement community of 700 people. The residents will volunteer at the child care center, helping to keep costs contained. One resident volunteer, a former professor at Arizona State University and now a spry 86 says, "The children look at the lines on our faces at the beginning. As the friendship grows, they don't see that at all. They see the person from the inside out. As we go through life, we see the effect of nurturing. We see the effect of love in a life. We're doing something here that's major."

The Tucson Unified School District and Kids Forever, a private child care provider, have begun a public-private partnership to provide families with comprehensive services. With dollars from the state's "At-Risk Preschool Program," the six NAEYC-accredited child care centers offer high quality child care for at-risk four-year-old children living in the school district. TUSD is delighted with the quality of care. Kids Forever is delighted with their access to excellent training opportunities provided by the Arizona Department of Education that came as a benefit of the contract. This partnership is an excellent example of how public dollars and private efficiencies benefit both partners, and most importantly, offer top quality service to children and their families.

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Looking Ahead

When it comes to child care, people seem to agree that children deserve quality care and that quality care should be a child's right, not a privilege. But acting on that belief is a far cry from simply espousing it. Reaching and sustaining our ideals for children requires shared responsibility — a deep understanding that every child is our own and worthy of fighting for.

Our political will must be strong enough to do "what is right" by every child in our state. There are many things you can do for children that move us one step closer to our child care ideal.

- As an individual, the ultimate force for holding elected officials accountable is your vote. Don't take it lightly. Vote for policymakers who have the courage to make tough political decisions that support working families.

- As an employer or supervisor, you can influence your employees with children. You may not be aware of how your policies and decisions exercise control over their freedom and capacity to provide safe, reliable care for their families. Reflect on how you can support them in their parenting roles, and then take action that benefits both them and your company.

- As a community member, support policies that help parents who are continuing their education or furthering themselves. Support policies that guarantee standards of health, safety, and quality care for children.

- As a member of the oldest and strongest democracy on earth, make yourself heard. Join with other voices who are no longer willing to permit political forces to put our children in harm's way. When enough of us make our will known, the shift in priorities occurs. It then becomes difficult to understand why we didn't change before.

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Children's Action Alliance (CAA) is a private, nonprofit, research, policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to promoting the well-being of all of Arizona's children and families. Through research, publications, media campaigns, and advocacy, we act as a strong and independent voice for children who cannot speak for themselves. Our fundamental goal is to bring about a greater understanding by policymakers, business leaders, the media, and the general public of the high economic and social stake that all Arizonans have in the well-being of our children. CAA is supported by foundations, corporate grants, and individual contributions.

Success By 6, a project of Children's Action Alliance, is a statewide collaborative effort to ensure that all of Arizona's children are ready for success in school by age six.

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